

*PETER EISENMAN*

# **FIN D'OU T HOU S**

*With introductory essays  
by Nina Hofer and Jeffrey Kipnis*

*Architectural Association  
1985*

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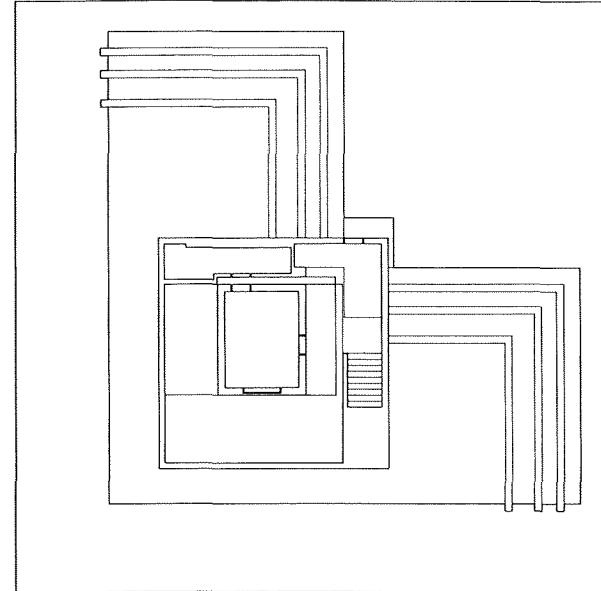
*ARCHITECTURE UNBOUND*

*Consequences of the recent work of Peter Eisenman*

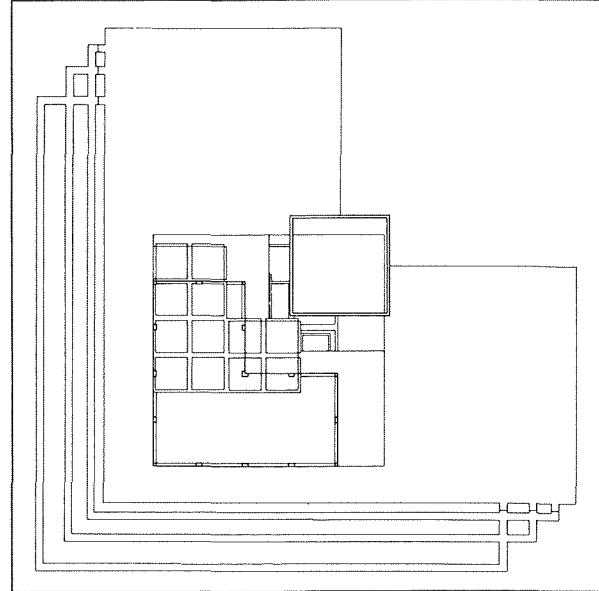
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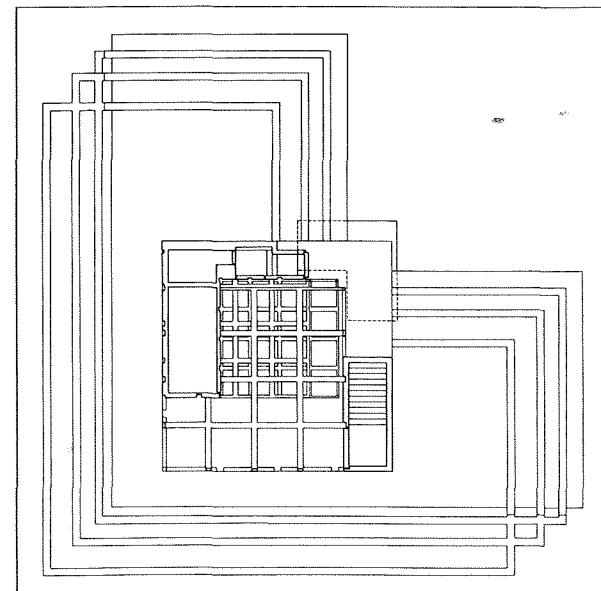
*1 Fourth Stage; First Level Plan*



*2 Fourth Stage; Second Level Plan*



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*4 Fourth Stage; Roof Plan*

# FIN D'OU T HOU S

Nina Hofer

*'What can be the model for architecture when the essence of what was effective in the classical model - the presumed rational value of structures, representations, methodologies of origins and ends and deductive processes - have been shown to be delusory?'*

*'What is being proposed is an expansion beyond the limitations presented by the classical model to the realisation of architecture as an independent discourse, free from external values; that is, the intersection of the meaningful, the arbitrary and the timeless in the artificial.'*

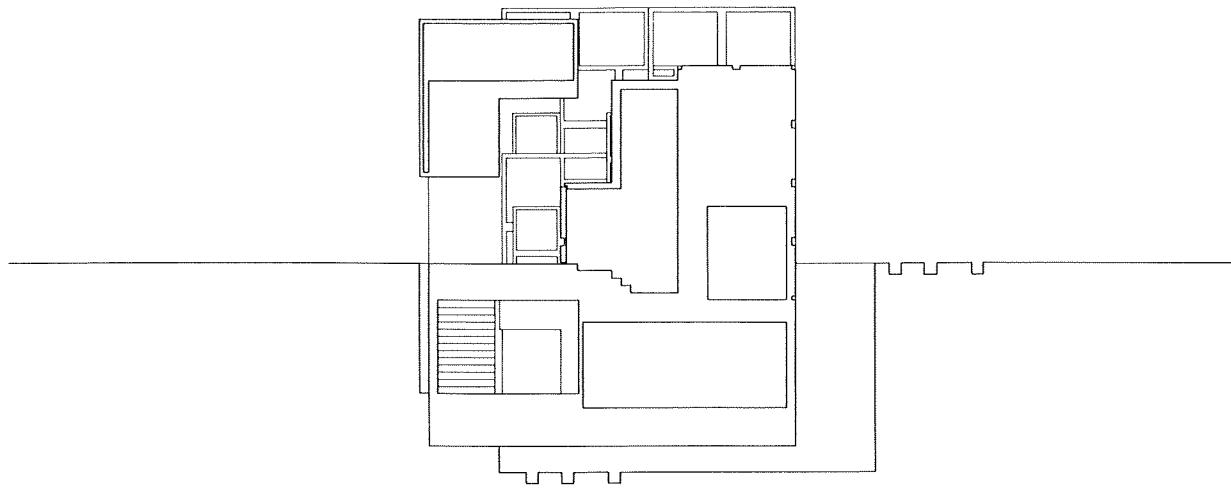
Peter Eisenman, 'The End of the Classical', *Perspecta* 21, 1984.

Traditionally, the architectural object was assigned a value based upon the strength and visibility of its connection to a set of programmatic requirements including function, structure, meaning and aesthetics. Judgement of value on the basis of extrinsic criteria was perceived and defined as rational. Non-conformity in this context marked a value-less architecture.

The first premise of the Fin d'Ou T Hou S is that the world can no longer be understood in relation to any 'absolute' frame of reference devised by man. If one accepts this presupposition then the concept of extrinsic or relative value becomes meaningless and traditional rationalism merely arbitrary. Fin d'Ou T Hou S suggests that the architectural object must become internalised so that its value lies in its own processes. Those programmatic requirements which had previously been seen as the causes must now become the effects of architecture. Fin d'Ou T Hou S is not rational architecture in the traditional sense. It proposes an intrinsic value system as an alternative to a context of arbitrariness; it is true to its own logic. Faced with an object that admits no discursive element external to its own processes, our customary role as subject is futile, and we are bereft of our habitual modes of understanding and appraising architecture. Eisenman suggests that Fin d'Ou T Hou S requires a new reader, willing to suspend previous modes of deciphering for an attitude of receptive investigation.

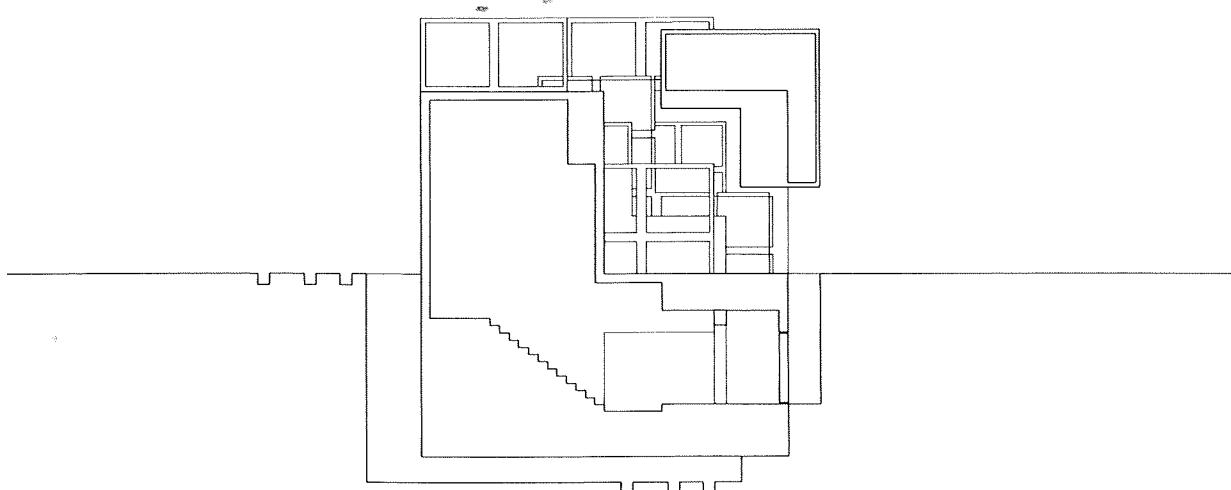
While Fin d'Ou T Hou S claims to be self-definitive, it does not claim to be self-explanatory. The process records its own history at every point in its development, but any one of the steps shown, including the last, is no more than an artificial representation of a single frame from a seamless continuity which would be self-explanatory if it could be recreated. Traditionally, the necessity of a score or a text devalued the architectural project. Here Fin d'Ou T Hou S is presented as a score of its process; text is provided in the form of a presentation and critique of decomposition as architectural process and an explanation of the analysis and processes discovered in the initial configuration. This presentation is consistent with the devaluation of object in favour of process.

**DECOMPOSITION** How, then, does Fin d'Ou T Hou S come into being? Any answer to this question must remain conjectural if the object is understood to emerge according to a set of internalised principles. As a starting point, it cannot come into being through the traditional process of composition; a process embedded in an irretrievable past and inextricably bound



5 Fourth Stage; Section

6 Fourth Stage; Section



to human subjectivity. Fin d'Ou T Hou S is Eisenman's attempt to uncover a new process by suspending, as far as possible, externalisations of these subjectivities. The process must occur somewhere in the realm of non-composition; Eisenman calls its specific location in this realm decomposition. This choice of words is not intended to imply a dialectical opposition to composition or a necessary reciprocity between the two; rather Eisenman suggests that the process may be entirely different.

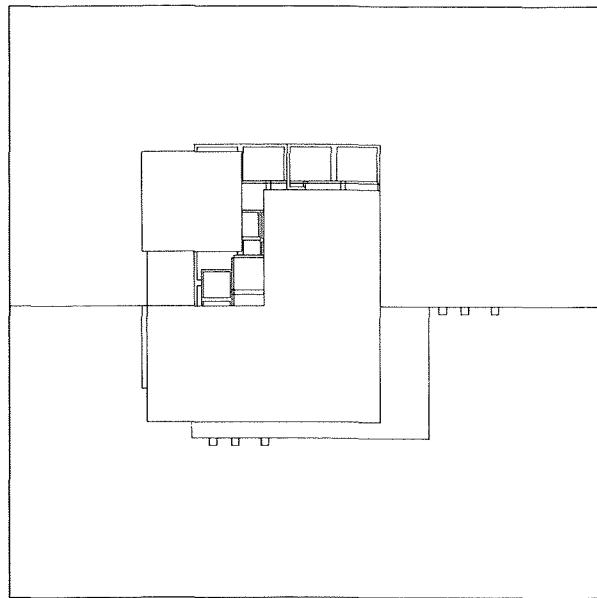
*'Both composition and transformation contain the idea of original perfection. The significance of the final form resides in its capacity to reveal its own origins. Decomposition presumes that origins, ends and the process itself are elusive and complex rather than stable, simple and pure.'*

Peter Eisenman, 'The Futility of Objects', *Harvard Architecture Review*, No.3, 1984.

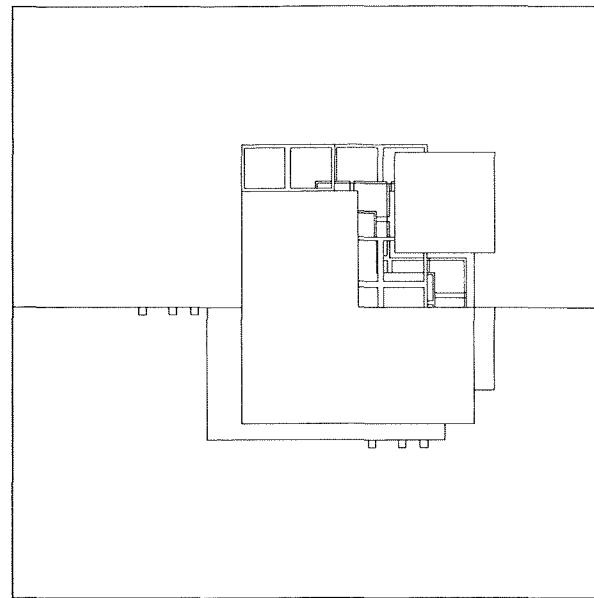
The origins of both classical composition and modernist transformations are simple type forms, and the processes themselves linear and progressive, moving from known and knowable beginnings to predictable ends. Decomposition as an 'other' process can be said to have neither beginning nor end. Its point of departure is the postulation of a complex and unstable object which Eisenman calls the non-originary condition of origin. Analysis of this object reveals which processes may be integral to its instability. These processes are registered and presumed to be in motion within the object. The instability lies in its distance from some essential formal representation of its structure – an origin from which it did not begin. The decomposition of the object will seem to take it towards the origin as if proceeding from an end to a beginning. It will asymptotically approach a point of tangency on a compositional vector proceeding away from origin; here it can be perceived as related to the results of this vector but will remain essentially dissimilar because of its initial instability. What differentiates decomposition from reverse transformation is that the decompositional object will never return to its non-originary condition of origin or any classical condition of origin, type, form or state of closure. Nor is the process reversible; any process taking it towards its point of departure will result in an object state possessing further instabilities. The asymptotic rather than directional nature of this process challenges traditional concepts of beginning and end.

Fin d'Ou T Hou S as an approximation of decomposition starts from a configuration which is stable in topological terms but unstable in Euclidean terms. Eisenman has proposed the el shape as a transitional object, suspended between classical stability and some 'other' state. The point of departure for Fin d'Ou T Hou S is an artificial origin consisting of two els, interjacent in such a way that they share a topological axis of symmetry. In Euclidean or classical space, however, they suggest the possibility of the smaller one moving out in three dimensions to complete the missing quadrant of the larger one. Were this to happen, the resulting configuration would suggest a cube. This suggestion is considered part of the structure of the object. The cube is consequently postulated as a perceived origin. The decomposition process will consist of moves along an

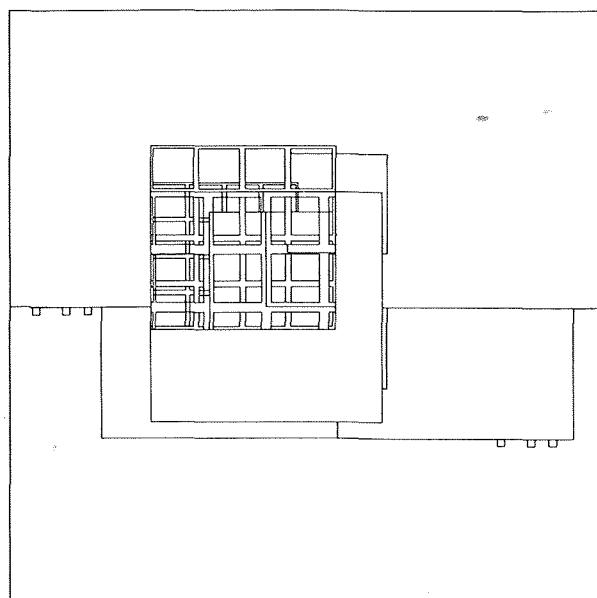
*7 Fourth Stage; North Elevation*



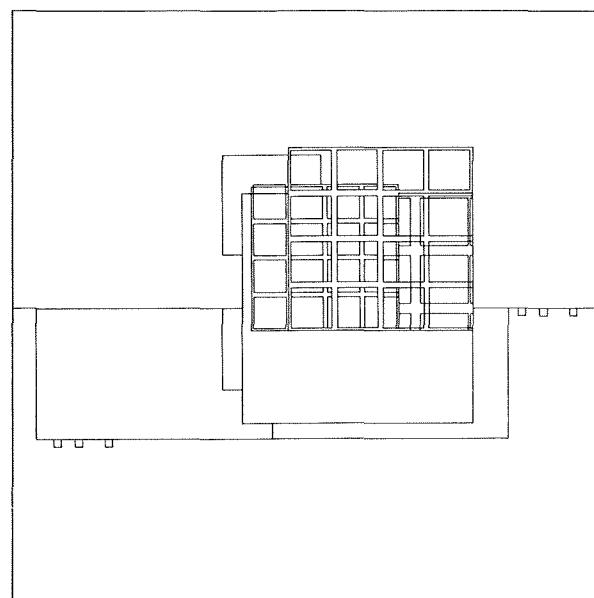
*8 Fourth Stage; East Elevation*



*9 Fourth Stage; South Elevation*



*10 Fourth Stage; West Elevation*



asymptotic vector approaching a state of transformation from this cube. Each move will transform the form, leaving a record of its previous state. Three decompositional objects are presented, one selected from each of three continuous decompositional moves. The presentation ends after the third because at this stage the object achieves a condition of suggested affinity with a cube. It is not, however, the one initially suggested, possessing neither closure nor stability. It insists on the possibility of further moves, simultaneously recalling the original els and moving onwards, again towards the cube as origin. If the process did continue from this point, it would reach neither condition; in this way it defies interpretation as end.

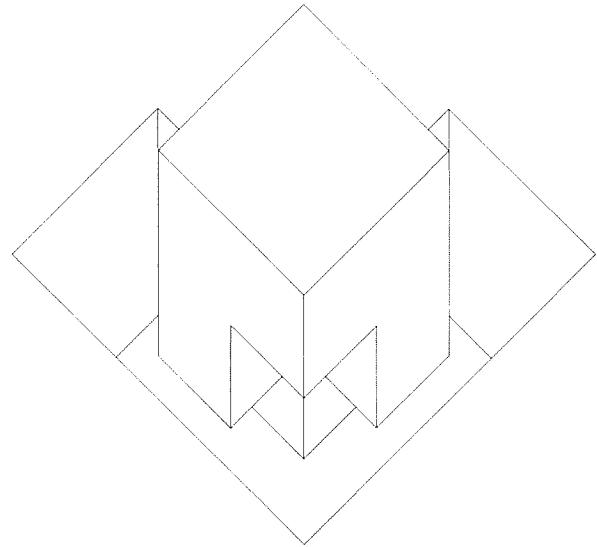
*'The object, as an initial state of complexity, and the process, as the will to simplify, are played out in the architecture; they endlessly celebrate a process which they cannot complete.'*

Peter Eisenman, 'The Futility of Objects', *ibid*.

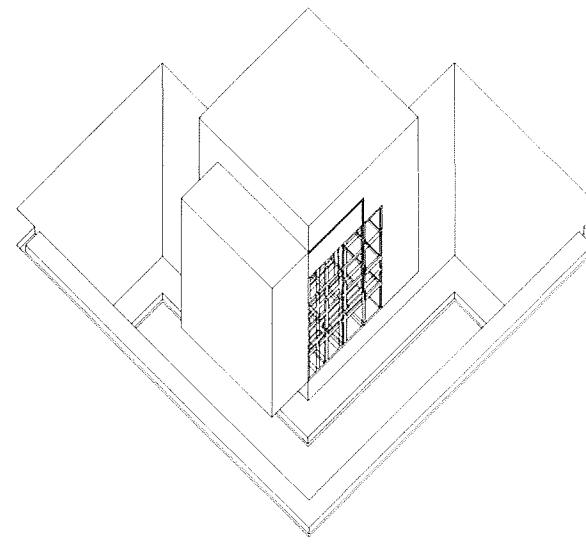
**THE LIMITATIONS OF SUBJECTIVITY** Fin d'Ou T Hou S is proposed as an approximation of decomposition rather than an example of it. The aspects in which it remains related to traditional compositional presuppositions describe the horizons of man's ability to imagine a process which is without reference to his internal systems of order and perception. There are two clear instances of this inescapable disjunction.

The first has to do with the choice of the cube as perceived origin. If the object were acting according to its own laws, would it necessarily be affected by a 'pure type form' which is no more than our perception of its simplification? A cube is essentially unrelated to an el shape in several crucial ways, possessing Euclidean rather than topological symmetry around its datum point, a conceptually different location for its point of origin, and different patterns of potential growth. It is even less related to the interjacent els; it has no qualities of two in one, of reciprocity within its form between solid and void, or of instability in Euclidean space. The initial object in decomposition would be more likely to act according to some formal description of its own essential structure which might be totally dissimilar in appearance. The affiliation between the object and the cube is an approximation, with reference to our perceptual habits, of the relationship which may exist between a decompositional object and the structural suggestion of its non-originary condition of origin.

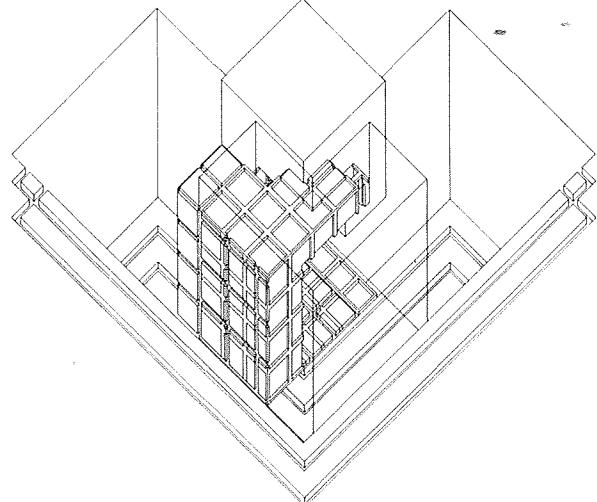
Similarly, the extent to which the process of Fin d'Ou T Hou S is understood and presented as linear in time and space reflects many traditional presuppositions. There is a compositional inversion present in the movement from a complex form towards (but not to) a simpler one, suggesting that decomposition moves backwards in time as we perceive it. But decomposition as non-composition may be a non-linear process, non-directional in space and non-continuous in time. Eisenman is aware of these limitations. Decomposition is here deflected, as perhaps it will always be, by our need to understand and portray it from within a known intellectual framework. We must start from familiar concepts in order to work our way out of them and our starting point



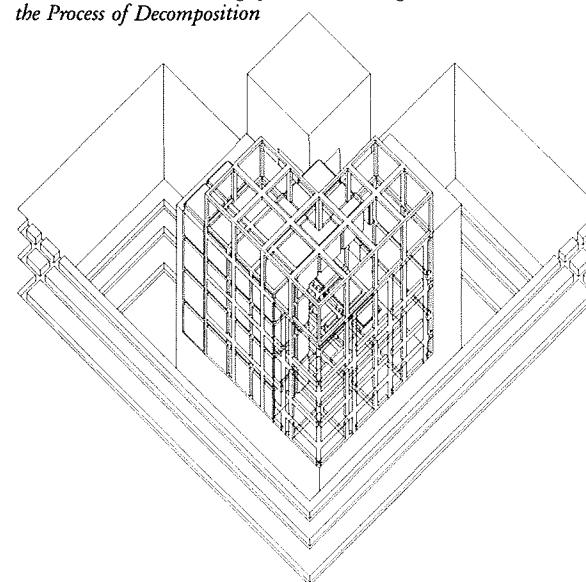
11 Axonometric Drawing of the First Stage in  
the Process of Decomposition



12 Axonometric Drawing of the Second Stage in  
the Process of Decomposition



13 Axonometric Drawing of the Third Stage in  
the Process of Decomposition



14 Axonometric Drawing of the Fourth Stage in  
the Process of Decomposition

may ensure that we never quite reach ‘the other’. In the attempt, however, Fin d’Ou T Hou S uncovers a process of making which is fundamentally different from traditional modes of design.

**THE INITIAL POSITION** Two el shapes appear; one is a present solid, the other is a present void, one half the size of the solid el.

Each el is an unstable object created by the simultaneous movement of one point in one direction along each spatial co-ordinate, existing suspended between this point and the cube it will never become. In the initial position the void el is artificially grafted into the solid el; embedded within the cube in a manner suggested by the solid el’s shape. The void el and the solid el share the same topological axis of symmetry but are oriented in different directions along it. The two els are conjoint at their most unstable point, the inner corner of their absent quadrant. The distance from this point to any point on the solid el is twice the distance to the corresponding point on the void el. The two els become one object but retain their discrete identities as well.

Earth and air are chosen as the site.

The relationship between object and site is created by two factors: the horizontal plane where earth and air meet corresponds to the horizontal datum plane of the object. The solid el points down, the void el points up. The object is placed on the site in a similar manner to the way in which the smaller el is located within the larger el but this time within the trace of a void el shape, twice as large as the solid el. The topological axes of object and site are perpendicular and thus can be said to differ directionally along one spatial co-ordinate.

The three together – object, site el and horizontal plane – create an initial neutral datum point relating object and site. The topological axis of the site neutralises the vertical direction of the axis of the object and the horizontal plane cuts these axes at their point of intersection.

**THE PROCESS OF DECOMPOSITION** The process of decomposition begins when the smaller el moves as if towards closure of the object – one move in each spatial co-ordinate we are able to recognise. At each move it takes over some of the space originally occupied by the larger el and grows as a reaction to this incorporation. The large el responds by reducing its size in order to preserve its integrity.

The specifics of these moves reflect the structure of the object. The essential structure of each el lies in its relationship of one to two; it can be read equally as heading towards completion as a solid cube or as a cubic void growing to a cubic void twice as large – reducing the el to a point. As movement in this process is an individual action performed by the void el alone, it will move one half of its size in each direction.

The essential structure of the object as a whole lies in the relative size and position of embeddedness of the els. The small el cuts the large el into quarters. Growth and diminution of the els are actions occurring simultaneously and reciprocally, a function involving the entire object. Therefore, the els will shrink or grow one quarter of their size in each dimension at each move.

A cube grows in all directions out from a stable, central origin. This is not true for the el shape which is generated by the simultaneous movement of a point in one direction along each dimensional axis. Its growth and diminution reflect this basic structure; it grows away from or shrinks towards a stable point of origin located in the corner opposite its void quadrant.

As the two els move apart, the initial datum point created by the coincidence of their axes and the site breaks apart; the two factors relating object to site also become disengaged. During this process the horizontal plane of the site remains in constant correlation with the initially smaller void el, and the large void el relating object to site remains in constant correlation with the initially larger solid el.

**OBJECT STATES** As the els move, shrink and grow, volumes in different states pass over each other or overlap. Changes in state result from these overlaps. As there is a differentiation between the active and passive agents of these overlaps there is a differentiation (rather than a valency) attached to the order in which they overlap; active is linked neither with the dominant nor the recessive components overall in the postulations below.

Four possible states for form to take are considered; present solid, absent solid, present void and absent void. This system of classification proves more integral to the object than the more simple solid/void opposition in a number of ways. The solid/void relationship can be considered closed; an object can only be in one or the other state, no 'other' state is allowed for. This object is not a closed object in a traditional sense; the two els are not in a simple relation of opposition. This system allows a form to be in a condition of solid or not solid, void or not void. It does not exclude but transcends the simpler opposition.

*Postulations:*

<i>Active</i>		<i>Passive</i>		<i>Result</i>
Presence	<i>over</i>	Presence	<i>creates</i>	Absence
Absence	<i>over</i>	Absence	<i>creates</i>	Presence
Presence	<i>over</i>	Absence	<i>creates</i>	Presence
Absence	<i>over</i>	Presence	<i>creates</i>	Absence
Void	<i>over</i>	Void	<i>creates</i>	Solid
Solid	<i>over</i>	Solid	<i>creates</i>	Void
Void	<i>over</i>	Solid	<i>creates</i>	Solid
Solid	<i>over</i>	Void	<i>creates</i>	Void

**NOTATION AND TRACE** At every stage there is a physical presence (present or absent solid or void) and a memory marked by a trace of a previous stage (present or absent solid or void).

*Notations of Presence:* Notations appear only on the surface of a form. They identify its stage and the structure of the el it is part of. In this way, the structure of the object is made apparent

in its notation by a grid dividing the surfaces of the el shape into quarters.

Present Solid	:	Opaque Colour
Present Void	:	Transparent Colour (Transparency)
Absent Solid	:	Translucent Plane Grids
Absent Void	:	Translucent Line Grids

The edges of an absent void or an absent solid may lie within another shape rather than being coincident with its surface; in this case absent void has a notation of a white plane and absent solid of a black plane.

*Notations of Trace:* As a form moves it leaves a trace of its previous position. A notation of its previous state will appear on the surface of this trace in the form of a grid dividing it into quarters.

Present Solid	:	Void Line	Grid
Present Void	:	Solid Line	Grid
Absent Solid	:	Solid Plane	Grid
Absent Void	:	Solid Line	Grid (Void Plane Grid)

Notation of trace shows itself only on surfaces between two different matter states; where present void interfaces with present void, for example, no notation of trace could be registered. If notations of trace are shown on the surface of an absent solid or void they reverse.

*Notations of Colour:* The two els are conceptually grey, essentially ambiguous. In this case one is opaque grey, the other is transparent grey. When they appear together in a relative position each el embodies a complementary aspect of the structure of the object as a whole: they are two in one. To reflect this state red and green were chosen. If the solid parts enter the void, they must remain differentiated from the solid parts of the initially solid el so that the object will retain its reciprocal quality of two balanced parts in one indeterminate object. At each move the initial colour of the els changes. As each el grows or shrinks it loses or gains in density; as the void el moves it moves into the space occupied by the red el and takes on some of its colour. Thus the green of the initially void el at the third move is a less dense and greyer green than at its initial position. Similarly, as the solid el shrinks away from the void el its red becomes progressively less green. The red of the initially solid el at the third move is denser and purer than its initial red. At every stage the quantity and colour intensity of the forms derived from the void and those derived from the solid are equivalent. The object as a whole is conceptually the same grey at every stage.

*Representation:* The conventions chosen to represent object states are neither immutable nor arbitrary. They are always integrally related to the structure of the object. In some cases other representational systems, equally appropriate but not fundamentally different, could be chosen.

ARCHITECTURE UNBOUND  
Consequences of the recent work of Peter Eisenman

Jeffrey Kipnis

Peter Eisenman's Fin d'Ou T Hou S is the most recent in the architect's evolving series of investigatory studies and the second in his development of a new transformational method he names 'decomposition'. In order to explore decomposition critically, to examine its motivation, methodological underpinning and results as expressed in Fin d'Ou T Hou S, we must first situate it in relation to Eisenman's earlier work.

**IN VITRO ARCHITECTURE: Transformations And The Search For Essence** From the beginning, Eisenman has committed his efforts to the irredentist project in architecture, the disentanglement of an *essential architecture* from the myriad allegiances into which it had entered and become complacent – history, type, function, programme, etc. – in order to recover the very possibility of architecture, radicalising an enterprise once strongly identified with the pragmatic reductionism of the Modern Movement.

The failure of Modernism to achieve either of its utility-coordinated goals in sociology or epistemology, marked by its lapse into a convenient, if flaccid, style, has spawned two major responses: the regrounding of sociological purpose exemplified in the works of Krier and Rossi, and the abandonment of the essentialist project for an eclecticist/historicist design emphasis as in the work of Venturi or Graves.

Eisenman instead moved to reanimate the stalled pursuit of essence by rejecting the empiricist methods of the Moderns, particularly their elevation of function to the status of governing principle, i.e., a priority of purpose accorded self-evident status. Noting that function is but one possibility of form, Eisenman argued that all such possibilities cannot be known *a priori* or discovered empirically. [The Moderns proposed to extract architecture from history by identifying its essential, therefore *a priori*, purpose. They selected one aspect of function, use, to elevate to an *a priori* principle of architecture. It is obvious now that the actual function of architecture is far more complex than the efficient use of a building, but even within the bounds of their own postulate, the possible uses of form that they considered to be self-evident were known to them only through a tradition, a history, of use. Therefore form cannot follow function until function has first emerged as a possibility of form. Even the possibilities of utility cannot be known empirically.] Accordingly, his argument continued, architecture, in its essence, cannot be form following function, or decorated building, or expressed history, or any other empirical manifestation, but must be the unique relational structure that generates the possibility of these. Thus the essentialist project for Eisenman became the search for this presumed structure.

Eisenman reasoned that as long as architecture was designed by a subjective process, i.e. *composed*, an empirical priority, whether historic, utilitarian or aesthetic, was inescapable, a congenital characteristic of compositional procedure itself. He concluded that in order to untether architecture from empiricism, the source of the empirical, the subjectivity of the architect, must

as much as possible be removed. He had thus outlined an *in vitro* programme of reduction from a priori first principles rather than towards them (as in the empirical methods of the Moderns), a programme that recalled the eidetic reductions of Edmund Husserl. [Edmund Husserl, founder of modern phenomenology, made use of two methods to disencumber essence from subjective elaboration – one of these was eidetic reduction. In eidetic reduction, the concept under investigation is subjected to multiple variations; these, in turn, are compared to discover what remains unchanged in the multiplicity; essence then is that aspect that remains unchanged during the process of variation.]

Removing the architect meant somehow automating architecture. Eisenman began by inventing transformational procedures which, ideally, would govern the development of a reduced fundamental space, typically a cube, with a minimum of subjective intrusion, i.e. without regard to any architectural a priori – use, type, tradition (of the ‘door’, for example), etc. – other than space (form) and the rules of the transformation. Eisenman’s experimental hypothesis held that if the product of the transformation were substantial, i.e. unambiguously architectural, even though it resulted from a process bereft of reference to any empirical tradition in architecture (other than space/form), then aspects of the essential structure of the possibility of architecture might be revealed. [‘Unambiguously architectural’ here means the experience is one immediately apparent as, without doubt, of architecture. Perhaps an example of this reasoning applied in other circumstances would clarify the basis of this hypothesis. Glossolalia, the ‘speaking in tongues’ associated with extreme religious passion, though bereft of meaning, of the signification of language, is nevertheless experienced unambiguously as a speech, as its name and glossematic analysis testify. One can then conclude that no condition of meaning is a priori for the experience of speech, contrary to defining it in terms of meaningful language. Further, an essential structure of speech independent of meaning, the phonemic structure, is revealed in glossolalia precisely because meaning has been ‘reduced’ out.

Similarly, if all architectural traditions are reduced out of a developed form/space that is still unambiguously experienced as architecture, an essential structure of architecture, independent of its history, is revealed.]

It would be entertaining to speculate in depth on the conscious and unconscious motives for Eisenman’s dogged pursuit of structural essence, but one fact is clear: had his goal of finding the unique structure that enabled all of architecture been realised, been realisable, architecture, and particularly the creative architect, would have been rendered obsolete. The will to power implicit in all architectural efforts – to inspire, to awe, to persuade – would have been reigned in for all time under the architect’s control. For in this dream of essential structure lay the possibility of power. Capturing essence was capturing the source of power.

Though the first period of this work, spanning roughly Houses I through VI, did indeed produce

a new and substantial lexicon of architectural possibilities, the work nevertheless apparently failed in its essentialist aspiration. Rather than ‘exposing’ an essential structure of (all) architectural possibility in an unambiguously accessible announcement of purely formal relations, the success of the work, its architectural potency, seemed, paradoxically, to depend on ambiguity, on a deflection of readable intent. The potency rested not, as hoped, in palpable internal logic, but in the conveyance of a ‘justified’ radicality. Had an essential structure for architecture free of empirical constraint been revealed, the effect would have been an immediate translation of intent from form. The oddities in the houses would have been apparent as inevitabilities of the generating logic, and consequently not read as radical or perverse. Instead, the perversities, while not transcending their radical identity, took on a character different from radicalities in the work of other architects, e.g. Site, which read as idiosyncratic invention with signatory or stylistic intent. The perversities in Eisenman’s houses seemed ‘justified’, somehow appropriate. [This ‘somehow’, as we will discover, is by virtue of the environment created for their reading; the identification of Eisenman with analytic discourse as a theoretician is therefore an intrinsic aspect of his architecture.] However, this effect, like all architectural effects, is one of theatre, not structure. Even Eisenman’s effort to counsel correct reading of his work in essays served to enhance the staging of his work rather than clarify, an effect to which we will have cause to return in our discussion of the Fin d’Ou T Hou S texts.

Through this work, Eisenman came to realise that the existence of an essential architecture, free of subjectivity, was itself an empirical presumption; consequently, no logic could truly be internal, no relational structure of possibility could be exposed in its own objectivity. Architecture was inextricably located in the mind of a reader. *The essence of architecture lay in the inescapable inevitability of formal relations provoking reading.*

**IN VIVO ARCHITECTURE: Essence (Accidentally) Found** Eisenman, in his futile pursuit of an essential governing structure, had come inexorably to a principle of essential subjectivity, a principle that is fundamentally a principle of reading, of a reader, in short, an *in vivo* principle. The architect’s early work was not without validity, however. Though its results compelled a necessary subjectivism, it freed architecture from an empiricism *bound* strictly to available subjective foundations (of the history of architecture, for example), an indenture implicit in the work of Graves and Venturi. His transformational studies opened the possibility of the architect creating a self-contained, fictionally empirical environment dependent on and referring to little other externality than reading itself.

Eisenman’s original goal echoed that of the whole of semiological enterprise, a product of structuralism, which seemed finally to have provided the methodological basis for a ‘science of man’. Not surprisingly, his initial transformations were efforts to analyse the transformational-generative grammar of Noam Chomsky, one of the then heralded ‘successes’ in

applied structuralism. No doubt this act, however rationalised, was in part motivated by a sense of intellectual indebtedness.

In the midst of pursuing this elusive goal Eisenman began to read the works of Jacques Derrida whose readings, termed ‘deconstructions’, of the discourse of semiology raised profound questions about the metaphysical assumptions underlying the entire project of semiology, particularly its presumption of an *in vitro* analytic possibility.

Of particular significance to Eisenman were two aspects of Derrida’s work on writing (1) the deconstruction of Western Civilisation’s privileging of alphabetic script as its (only) ‘writing’, and (2) the deconstruction of semiology’s privileging of speech as language, with its concomitant exclusion of writing as technique and thus irrelevance to the study of language.

In one of the most significant of Derrida’s essays for architecture he scrutinises the heretofore unquestioned privileging of phonetic script as the only writing of Western Civilisation. He shows the narrow identification of writing with this script to be a profound ethnocentrism, an unsustainable prejudice. Writing, in Derrida’s formulation, is any and every organisation of form that stimulates an organised experience of reading. Writing is thus no longer limited to script, but includes such systems as speech and architecture.

Derrida further demonstrates that identification of script as writing is a gesture necessary to exclude writing in general from what semiology takes to be ‘language in general’, namely speech. He argues that this unjustified exclusion of writing and privileging of speech is complicit with an underlying delusion of the existence of objective truth, a ‘metaphysics of presence’. All language, including that which we call language but by which we mean speech, is generalised writing, i.e. organisations of subjectively vested [In *Of Grammatology* Derrida notes that de Saussure justifies the exclusion of writing from the analysis of language (speech) on the principle that phonetic writing is merely a visual encoding of speech, and thus only an ancillary technique in the service of speech. Derrida argues: ‘...that particular model which is phonetic writing does not exist’ (Derrida’s emphasis); ‘no practice is ever totally faithful to its principle’, a fact that correct spelling and spacing between words verify (if writing were purely phonetic, purely a sign of sound, there would be no ‘correct’ spelling nor spaces between written words.)]

Further, correct spelling, *good* and *bad* spelling, reveals the degree to which each form of writing carries its own subjective investment; it then cannot be merely an arbitrary signifier, but must be one vested form which references another.] forms caught up endlessly in referring to other forms, these in turn referring to other forms, ad infinitum. The desire for truth in presence, for a thing ‘to be what it is’, for a voice ‘to say what it means’, which is the desire for a *transcendental signified*, a final objective certainty, is always frustrated.

Derrida’s analysis of the repression of writing accounts for the difficulty in coming to terms with architecture as a writing. If the concept of writing challenges the authority of the voice to know

its own meaning by revealing language to be an open-ended play of reference, it in the same way challenges the autonomous integrity of the object. As long as architecture is seen as an object, it remains an effaced writing bound to one discourse, the authority of the presence of that object. Thus language cannot be a code in which ‘understanding’ denotes that unique correct decoding of a signifier to a final signified. Reading can never be a decoding; the experience of ‘meaning’, which is merely the name under which each of us privileges our own reading, is always a recoding, a misreading.

The consequence of putting to rest a transcendental signified, which would have been the source of an ultimate correct decoding, is the congenital subjectivity of reading, and therefore of meaning. Without recourse to a transcendental signified, reading/writing becomes the endless play of signifiers, the constantly changing in-betweenness of difference. [The betweenness reading, which Derrida calls *‘différance’*, is the always-in-flux space that constitutes the relations that are reading itself; scene of intrinsic subjectivity, it is the *playground* named Mind. Derrida’s *différance* is a construction from the French conveying both the verbs to differ and to defer, indicating that no meaning is achieved, it is always endlessly deferred in vested form referencing vested form.]

Under the aegis of the transcendental signified an authoritative first principle governs relationships between orders of signifiers. Thus, for example, the first principle called History, generated by a transcendental Beginning, is the authority governing architectural relationships in that episteme; all readings of architecture in that context are ultimately efforts to decode The Beginning.

With the exposing of the transcendental signified as a metaphysical illusion came the end of the possibility of reading as decoding and the relaxation of the authority of any a priori. Reading, always the endless making of relations, figures, metaphors, analogies, is thus always the subjective making of references, of spaces between; as such *reading is itself writing*. And ‘architecture’, long thought to be a property of the object, is found to be an organisation existing only in certain spaces in-between, that is, a language.

Eisenman found in Derrida strong intellectual support for his conclusion that the experience of architecture was in its essence reading and that the practice of architecture is a writing in a sovereign language, freed of the quotation marks that, like colonial flags in an *irredenta*, had always announced architectural ‘language’ in supplicant allegiance.

**DECOMPOSITION** *‘For order and definiteness are much more plainly manifest in the celestial bodies than in our own frame; while change and chance are characteristic of the perishable things of earth.’* Aristotle in *Physical Thought from the Presocratics to the Quantum Physicists; An Anthology*, ed. Shmuel Sambursky, Pica Press, New York, 1975, p.62.

*If the celestial bodies are composite, and composite things imply decomposition, and things implying*

*decomposition imply decay (for the decomposition of the elements is a decay of the composite, and what implies decay has no omnipotence), it follows that the things in heaven, by their own nature, have no omnipotence.'* Johannes Philoponus, *ibid.*, p.118. [Among the many contributions of Philoponus (also known as John the Grammarian) and perhaps the most influential was his attack on Aristotle's postulate of the eternal stasis of the heavenly universe as the correlative of perfection to the imperfect perishability of earthly things. Unageing, unaltering and unmodifiable, Aristotle's heavens were omnipotent in their immunity from decay. Philoponus united the universe that Aristotle had divided into the stable heavens and the perishable earth with the theme of the universal perfection of God's will for creation and decay. His argument, that God created mortality and therefore mortality, not man's dream of immortality, is perfect, is a theme that has received innumerable treatments throughout history in myth and fiction, and now in architecture.]

The analysis leads to architecture as writing/reading, as language in general; all architecture, performance or response, has always exhibited the endless organising chain of reference referencing other references. The architect as writer faces a frustrating paradox: as does any author, he seeks to control the referential spaces he creates, but, because of the open-ended process of endless signification, he cannot actually aspire to *authority*. Writing within the bounds of empirical foundations, however, the architect gains authority from the omnipotence of first principles.

Eisenman, like Philoponus, desires to expose the contingency of the omnipotence of 'things in heaven'; i.e., the empirical foundations of the episteme rather than to write using them as first principles. For him, the traditional process of design by composition is the source of architecture's seemingly inescapable indenture to those fictions of Western Civilisation which have come to omnipotence through a privilege of not being read as fictive: for example, science and history. In the very posture of aspiring to compose a whole solution from elemental origins, the architect, to Eisenman, re-enacts over and over again the process by which empirical foundations come to their status as first principles.

Hence, a method committed to relinquishing goals, reasons, beginnings and ends becomes necessary for the architect to write a local empirical fiction of discourse, local in the sense that the space-between of reference is as much as possible internal, contained, divorced from deluding and power-gathering references to universal foundations. Derrida provides a methodology: *'...what, then, is the "strategic" necessity that requires the occasional maintenance of an old name in order to launch a new concept? With all the reservations imposed by this classical distinction between the name and the concept, one might begin to describe this operation. Taking into account the fact that a name does not name the punctual simplicity of a concept, but rather a system of predicates defining a concept, a conceptual structure centred on a given predicate, we proceed: (1) to*

*the extraction of a reduced predicative trait that is held in reserve, limited in a given conceptual structure... named X; (2) to the delimitation, the grafting and regulated extension of the extracted predicate, the name X being maintained as a kind of lever of intervention, in order to maintain a grasp on the previous organisation, which is to be transformed effectively. Therefore, extraction, graft, extension... this is what I call... writing.'*

Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981. [So remarkably close in spirit and detail is this passage to the procedure of Eisenman's decomposition that I have long felt that House X was named in direct reference to it ('...the name X being maintained as a kind of lever of intervention...'), a fact that Eisenman will neither confirm or deny. 'X' would have been a splendid lever of intervention for decomposition from the lineage of his other houses, which had been named with Roman numerals.]

The 'old name', the extraction of a reduced predicative trait, the grafting and regulating extension of that reduced trait utilising the residue of the old name as a 'lever of intervention', these are precisely the tactics of Eisenman's decomposition, a name that refers to Derrida's deconstruction.

When first introduced in House X, decomposition was a set of tactics for the manipulation and transformation of form, intended to produce self-contained discourse of readable relations *in an object*, the house. Using Derrida's prescription, it could be thought to consist of the 'old names' of square, cube and even house whose reduced predicative trait would be the echo of Cartesian theory, particularly as in reductive Modernism. From this 'lever of intervention' into form as discourse, Eisenman grafts negative space onto these primary forms, these 'heavenly things', subtending them into two- and three-dimensional 'els'. The graft was intended to imbed decay into the primary form, and the regulated extension, the opposing of these forms to produce relational space-between, marked by traces of the opposition, was intended to create an object that evidenced a fragmented and unreconstructable narrative of coming into or going out of being.

The problem with House X as an architectural writing was that the result was still an object, a 'heavenly thing', physically fragmented, but still a house. The authority of the unified object implicitly predisposed the readable context of the object, both physical and intellectual, to other houses, other unified objects, i.e. to the historic/dialectic environment. In short, Eisenman failed to take into consideration the power of epistemic reading pressures to incorporate his efforts into its own. From Derrida's prescription, it might be said that in House X Eisenman failed to decompose enough 'old names', leaving intact the house, the object, the title, the script, etc.

**Fin d'Ou T Hou S: The Book Unbound** In retrospect, House X must be seen as transitional to the first attempt at a comprehensive writing of an architectural text through decomposition,

Fin d’Ou T Hou S. It is most important to stress that Fin d’Ou T Hou S is not the name of any object, most certainly not the last of the formal manipulations that are but a part of Fin d’Ou T Hou S. Fin d’Ou T Hou S is a polylingual, architectural ‘book’ consisting of a proper name, several texts in English and several texts in French, each of which is a tactically important element in the unfolding of the architectural text.

Consider first the proper name itself, ‘Fin d’Ou T Hou S’, a splendid exercise in the decomposition of form to provoke endless, ungoverned reading. Eisenman begins with the old names ‘fine’, ‘find’, ‘doubt’, ‘out’ and ‘house’, and grafts onto these old names from the French ‘fin’ (n.f. end; adj. fine, sharp, or clever), ‘ou’ (where), ‘ou...ou’ (either...or), ‘doute’ (doubt), and ‘housse’ (covering). By manipulating the form in an essentially architectural manner [*If the non-phonetic moment menaces the history and the life of the spirit as self-presence in the breath, it is because it menaces substantiality...* Non-phonetic writing breaks the noun apart. It describes relations and not appellations. *The noun and the word, those unities of breath and concept, are effaced within pure writing* writes Derrida in *Of Grammatology* (p.26, English edition, emphasis added). Architecture as writing is, of course, a non-phonetic writing (as in fact is all writing to some extent). Because the breaking apart of the word by Eisenman is a non-phonetic writing of form stimulating an architectural reading, it can be argued that this writing is essentially architectural.] he contrives to create a decomposed *image*, which could not exist in either language, for phonetic writing in neither tongue admits words like ‘T’, ‘Hou’, or ‘d’Ou’, yet in every way looks consistent, i.e. one immediately knows to try and read it. So an endless play of readings: ‘find out house’, ‘fine doubt house’, ‘find either or’, ‘end of where’, ‘end of covering’, [In the wealth of reading possibilities, two of an ‘inside’ nature that have recently arisen might be interesting to indicate. ‘Fin d’Ou T’ can also suggest the French *fin d’août*, the end of August, the period, in fact, when the work on the project was completed. In addition, an English reader affecting French might well mispronounce this same fragment as ‘fondue’, a Swiss cooking technique (from the French *fondu* for melted, also a ballet term for bending at the knee) alluding to the presence of a Swiss-trained Dutch architect, Pieter Versteegh, as a principle design assistant!] etc., is provoked by regulated manipulation of the spaces – between letters, between languages, between image and writing – a manipulation that is in every way formal, in every way writing, yet blatantly independent of the manipulations that the foundations (of French or English) would permit.

More importantly, the space between the proper name and the subsequent texts, both literal and formal, becomes significant. The effect of the ‘title’, for that is now seen to be a misnomer, is to instruct the reader, to ‘raise the curtain’, so to speak, on the experience to be anticipated in the remaining chapters of this architectural text. What is thought to be ‘merely’ title turns out to be an essential gesture, a demonstrating prologue to an unambiguously architectural

experience; like the steeple on a New England Protestant church, the image ‘Fin d’Ou T Hou S’ is a necessary and in every way orthodox architectural element.

As we proceed into this book our next encounter is with the several literary texts, announcing their own status as follows: *‘Traditionally, the necessity of a score or a text devalued the architectural project. Here Fin d’Ou T Hou S is presented as a score of its process; text is provided in the form of a presentation and critique of decomposition as architectural process and an explanation of the analysis and processes discovered in the initial configuration. This presentation is consistent with the devaluation of object in favour of process.’* From the introduction to Fin d’Ou T Hou S.

One must be careful to situate this writing. [Care indeed must be taken from the outset with regard to literary texts. Mr. Eisenman perpetrates an intentional subterfuge by listing his editorial assistant, Nina Hofer as ‘author’ of these texts, a designation that is accurate in so far as it refers to the act, both physical and lexical, of their writing; but in their content, and in their inclusion, they reflect his authority and will, hence in this essay they are construed to have been ‘written’ by him.] The literary text now has no prior authority ‘over’ the formal work, it does not justify it, but rather participates in it, is an architectural element of it. It does not write about the work, but writes the work in two languages, the literary acting partially as score, partially as libretto, but primarily as preface, an integral, if peculiar, part of the book.

Why peculiar? As many architects of literary and philosophical discourse have noted and struggled with, the preface is indeed a most peculiar species of text. Within the boundaries, the cover to cover of a book, a preface is and isn’t. In its ‘pre-ness’ it claims to be outside of ‘the book itself’, a status that its physical inclusion and name belie. Its lie conspires to perpetrate the fiction of the original autonomy of the book, source of a final authority; for a preface is a reading of the book and therefore a writing (again) of it, since, as we have argued, there is no final reading that provides access to final meaning. Gayatri Spivak, in the preface(!) to her English translation of Derrida’s *De la grammatologie* captures the situation decisively: *‘The preface, by daring to repeat the book and reconstitute it in another register, merely enacts what is already the case: the book’s repetitions are always other than the book. There is, in fact, no “book” other than these ever-different repetitions: the book, in other words, is always already a “text”’* (N.B. what we have called a writing), ‘constituted by the play of identity and difference. A written preface provisionally localises the place where, between reading and reading, book and book, the inter-inscribing of “reader(s)”, “writer(s)”, and language is forever at work’.

*Of Grammatology*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1976, p.xii.

But if the lie of the preface is peculiar in literary works, it is insidious in architecture. There have been, of course, many architects who also write, but never, until now, has literary writing been allowed ‘within the covers’, even though, as is true for every reading, it has always been there. Even the designation ‘architects who also write’ evidences the extent to which ‘architecture’ is

desired to reside in and as a condition of an object. The space of relation between the preface and the book ‘proper’ is, at least, visible; the space between literary writing and writing in architecture ‘itself’, has been effaced in complicity with the metaphysics of presence, for what is more certainly present in autonomous integrity than an object? Yet architecture is not an object, but a response of reading/writing to a space-between. Hence, if architecture ‘itself’, as manipulation of form to provoke reading, is writing, then literary writing ‘about’ architecture is not actually ‘about’, not ‘near but not in’, it does not ‘circumscribe the thing’, but is also in every way architecture. Eisenman’s insistent inclusion of literary text within architecture reasserts that repressed space-between that has always existed.

However, a subtle trap is poised for the reader in the instructions to Fin d’Ou T Hou S against which we must remain vigilant: it implicitly claims privilege to be *the* correct reading, the author’s insightful instructions to his own insight. In light of our discussion of reading as writing, however, this privilege is illusory. In fact, in a way the author’s reading is the least privileged, for who is most convinced of the existence of *the meaning* and of the authority to *know* it than the author, even when his intentions are to write on the fiction of *the meaning*. Is not the author, as the one most certain of what has been done, the most victimised by blindness to the contingency of his insight. [This theme has been developed with some rigour in Paul De Man’s excellent collection of essays *Blindness and Insight*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983] Does he not know least what he has *actually* done, because what he has done, as writing, has no single actuality other than to provoke reading. For example, from the ‘definitive score’ we find the following assertion: *A cube grows in all directions out from a stable centre or point of origin*: Mathematics notwithstanding, what is this ‘growth’ indigenous to a cube? It is and can only be the intentionality of the writer, the architect, projected here into his material. Thus the text strives, against its announced intentions to explore the integrity of process, to assert the integrity of the object.

The effect of the preface is to martial authority for the upcoming ‘book’ proper, but we must resist and assert our own authority to (mis)read the book, an attitude on which Fin d’Ou T Hou S insists, even against its will.

The themes of internalisation, instability, growth and decay permeate the texts, and will provide the lever of intervention for our reading of the four object states that represent the incarnation in form of Fin d’Ou T Hou S.

Decomposition as a procedure for manipulating form differs from Eisenman’s earlier methods, primarily in its regard for the architect. If the intent of his transformations was to remove the *intruding* architect, to automate form, the intent of decomposition is to free the *necessary* architect from his indenture to empirical conditions imposed by the process of composition, enabling him to write any discourse or fiction.

In this regard the principle of decomposition must be distinguished from the particular mode in which Eisenman practices it. Decomposition is simply a method (extraction, graft, extension) which begins with an initial condition of the architect's invention and suggests modulations to satisfy any motivation. To be more precise, decomposition is not a 'new method' but a generalisation of method itself. In principle, then, composition is but a special case of decomposition: *the one* in which the powerful illusion of self-evidency of the initial conditions and motivation efface the freedom of the architect.

Thus our task as we turn to the forms of *Fin d'Ou T Hou S* is twofold; to examine Eisenman's intended discourse and its realisation through his use of decomposition, and to (mis)read the results. *'Fin d'Ou T Hou S suggests that the architectural object must become internalised so that its value lies in its own processes... It proposes an intrinsic value system...it is true to its own logic... (it) claims to be self-definitive.'* *Fin d'Ou T Hou S* text.

Let us then, for the time being, take these passages from the text to express Eisenman's intentional discourse and set as a goal for our reading to 'discover' what 'its own logic' can be.

Logic is a problem-solving response, so to provide an 'internal' problem for his form to respond to with 'its own logic' Eisenman in stage one invents initial conditions of an unstable form facing an apparent opportunity to achieve stability. The unstable form is a cube missing one octant; it faces the possibility of completion in the form of a smaller cube the size of the missing octant and itself missing an octant. This small cube is brought into axial confrontation with the void of the larger cube. In the terms of the decompositional prescription, the 'old name' is the cube; the reduced predicative trait is that form's Cartesian status of complete, permanent perfection, a 'heavenly body'; the graft is the bringing together of these two near-cubes, whose mutual, intrinsic appetite for completion provides the dynamic of their interaction, the extension.

In the subsequent three stages of the process two bodies play out in dramatic choreography the futility of their pursuit of final perfection. As each moves towards the other, it takes on the characteristics of its complement: for example, the smaller enlarges, the larger shrinks; all the while the changes each undergoes leaves a residue of its previous state in the form of traces of what it had been. One might say that each, in anticipation, images in itself the aspiration, the envy the other stimulates; in so doing, *'the two els become one object but retain their discrete identities as well'*. In so doing also they themselves frustrate the promise of final fulfilment, for as the action of their pursuit changes each of them, their complementarity falters; they overlap, collide and, after failing to unite in perfection, try again, readjust, compensate, always depositing a residue, the trace of their previous state. In the fourth stage we find the forms in an equilibrium not of scale but of exhausted desire, at rest in a denouement in which, the promise of perfect fulfilment denied, the forms are nevertheless quiescent in the maturation of their mutual process, they have reached what the architect calls 'tangency'. *'The aspects in which it remains related to*

*traditional compositional presuppositions describe the horizons of man's ability to imagine a process which is without reference to his internal systems of order and perception.*' Fin d'Ou T Hou S text. What is this internal logic in whose calculus the roster of operations includes appetite, desire, envy, frustration, adjustment, compensation, ego, growth, decay, maturity, and residue? Are not the stages of Fin d'Ou T Hou S those of the riddle of the sphinx or Piaget? Are we not witnessing in the inevitable intercourse of these desiring egos the only logic that can truly be internal to an object? Is Fin d'Ou T Hou S anything other than the drama of objects come to life, obeying the logic of living? Are not the reading spaces generated by this decomposition, between the stages, between the state of each object and the trace of its former self, etc., the space of the only real time and thus the only real history. Are not the traces the marking of the unification of maturation and decay, of aspirations and frustrations, of the self and the image of the self? The questions are infinite, but the theme remains the same. In retrospect, is not that which we have gone to such pains to name writing more properly named living?

There are, of course, many doubts and limitations to be discussed about Fin d'Ou T Hou S. Among the most significant is the persistent failure of Eisenman to recognise that the concept of reading is not limited to the cognitive act, that in fact habitation is itself a reading, not to be accommodated or dismissed as use, but to be incorporated as a principle of the architectural experience. Nevertheless, it might serve well to recall a remark of Philip Johnson in his postscript to *Five Architects*, '*One could wish for further books... Books call attention to architecture, force the reader (viewer) to focus...*' After reading Mr. Eisenman's most recent 'book', one might at least expect Mr. Johnson to reconsider the need for his parenthetic apology.

In the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea, the artist makes a statue so perfect that he falls hopelessly in love with it. As cold stone Galatea was immortalised beauty, that misguided ideal of perfection for man, a 'heavenly object'. The goddess Venus, in response to the dimension of the artist's love, breathes life into Galatea, echoing Philoponus' argument with Aristotle that it is timeful mortality, not timeless immortality that is a gift. It is Eisenman's accomplishment in Fin d'Ou T Hou S, not simply to have developed the theme of architecture as reading/writing, or to have rehabilitated the relationship between discourse and form, or to have proposed decomposition as a new method of practice, but to have literally (re)animated architecture, suggesting a timeful alternative to the futility of architecture's pursuit of the timeless.

## LIST OF PLATES

The drawings are presented in three forms, in line within this booklet,  
and in the Folio box as embossed plates  
and finally full colour as originally devised.

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